

Fall 2012

## Review of *Alexandre Hogue: An American Visionary -- Paintings and Works on Paper* by Susie Kalil

Mark White  
*University of Oklahoma*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

White, Mark, "Review of *Alexandre Hogue: An American Visionary -- Paintings and Works on Paper* by Susie Kalil" (2012). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2825.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2825>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*Alexandre Hogue: An American Visionary—Paintings and Works on Paper.* By Susie Kalil. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. xv + 207 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$35.00.

Susie Kalil's *Alexandre Hogue* surveys the artist's paintings and drawings from his earliest works of the 1920s to his mature paintings from the 1980s. Hogue remains best known for the *Erosion* series he produced in the 1930s and has been marginalized unfairly as a Regionalist ever since. Kalil intends to change that categorization by repositioning Hogue as a visionary painter who explored fundamental relationships between humanity and nature through a sensitive understanding of place. She hopes to leave the reader with a sense of "Hogue's continuing attempt to give voice and form to some of his deepest feelings and intuitions." This argument depends primarily on a metaphysical interpretation Kalil derives from her close formalist reading of Hogue's work. Lengthy quotations drawn from the numerous interviews Kalil recorded with the artist between 1986 and 1994 provide some support for this interpretation.

Hogue's strong presence in the book ensures its being an invaluable research tool for future scholars, but it also prevents Kalil from straying too far from an interpretation of Hogue's work that he would have supported. Artist's intent should be considered in any serious monographic study, but it can impose limitations. Kalil resists contextualizing Hogue's work by claiming his imagery is not theoretical, but "resonates in the gap between broad cultural memory and personal narrative." With

this assertion, she largely disassociates Hogue from cultural and intellectual history, even though she admits he was highly literate and an ardent student of geology, mathematics, science, philosophy, and religion. The reader is often left to guess how any of these disciplines, or the prominent thinkers connected to them, directly informed Hogue's work. For instance, there is little recognition of the critical literature on the Dust Bowl and ecology in her chapter on the *Erosion* series. Similarly, her chapter on his *Moon Shot* series is less interested in the science or politics of the Space Race than the cosmic implications she finds in the paintings. As she argues, "the *Moon Shot* series is simply a metaphor for our inner being. We dream of traveling through the universe—but isn't the universe within ourselves?"

Hogue may have intended his paintings to be read metaphorically as a spiritual investigation of nature, but Kalil's emphasis on that interpretation at the expense of other avenues of investigation misses an opportunity to explore Hogue's dynamic relationship with American culture, palpably evident in his paintings.

MARK WHITE  
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art  
University of Oklahoma